

January 6, 2010

DDD Clinical Practice Guideline: Dysphagia and Assessing Risk of Aspiration and Choking

Dear Care1st Physicians and Staff:

Persons with developmental disabilities, particularly aging individuals with Cerebral Palsy are at risk for problems with chewing and swallowing. Problems with chewing and swallowing can result in aspiration of food or liquid into the lungs, leading to damage to lung tissue and pneumonia. Dysphagia may also increase the likelihood of choking on food and sudden death. To assist physicians, Dr. Bob Klaehn, Division of Developmental Disabilities Medical Director has developed a Clinical Practice Guideline for Dysphagia and Assessing Risk of Aspiration and Choking.

Please assess persons with a developmental disability for the risk factor of aspiration while obtaining their medical history. In an effort to reduce the likelihood of aspiration, suggestions of possible interventions are included in the guideline and may be helpful in providing instruction to the family and/or caregivers.

Highlights of the Dysphagia and Assessing Risk of Aspiration and Choking Guideline include:

- Be very specific with regard to the type of diet necessary
- A referral to a nutritionist may be necessary
- Food should be cut into small bites—please specify the size of the bite. Never order cutting the food into bite sized portions as “PRN” or “as needed”.
- Educate families and caregivers to avoid “power struggles” over food. If food is denied, the individual may try and “sneak” the food and stuff quickly into their mouth causing a choking episode.

To access the entire Dysphagia and Assessing Risk of Aspiration and Choking Clinical Practice Guideline:

1. Go to www.care1st.com/az
2. Click on the “Providers” tab
3. Choose “Practice Guidelines & Preventive Health Guidelines” in the drop down menu under the “Providers” tab
4. Click on “Dysphagia and Assessing Risk of Aspiration and Choking”

If you have any questions, please contact our DDD Liaison, Kanika Lindsay at 602.778.1800 x1835.

Thank you!